

Appendix 1: QOL Indicators: Definitions and Sources

Variable	Definition	Source
Indices		
Human Development Index (HDI) 1970, 1980, 1995	The HDI is based on three indicators: longevity, as measured by life expectancy at birth; educational attainment, as measured by a combination of adult literacy and the combined first-, second- and third-level gross enrollment ratio; and standard of living, as measured by real GDP per capita (PPPS).	Human Development Report
Gender-related Development Index (GDI) 1995	The GDI uses the same variables as the HDI. The difference is that the GDI adjusts the average achievement of each country in life expectancy, educational attainment, and income in accordance with the disparity in achievement between men and women.	Human Development Report
Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) 1995	The GEM uses variables to measure explicitly the relative empowerment of women and men in political and economic spheres of activity. The first two variables are chosen to reflect economic participation and decision-making power: women's and men's percentage shares of administrative and managerial positions and their percentage shares of professional and technical jobs. These are broad, loosely defined occupational categories. Because the relevant population for each is different, a separate index for each is calculated and the two are then added together. The third variable, women's and men's percentage shares of parliamentary seats, is chosen to reflect political participation and decision-making power. An income variable is used to reflect power over economic resources. The three indices—for economic participation and decision making, political participation and decision making, and power over economic resources—are added together to derive the final GEM value.	Human Development Report

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Appendix 1 (Cont.)

Variable	Definition	Source
Indices		
Human Poverty Index (HPI-1) Value (%) 1995	The human poverty index for developing countries (HPI-1) concentrates on deprivations in three essential dimensions of human life already reflected in the HDI: longevity, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. The first deprivation relates to survival—the vulnerability to death at a relatively early age. The second relates to knowledge—being excluded from the world of reading and communication. The third relates to a decent living standard in terms of overall economic provisioning.	Human Development Report
Gender		
Female Share of Earnings (%) 1990, 1995	Percentage of total national earnings earned by women.	Human Development Report
Labor Force, Female (%) 1970, 1980, 1995	The labor force encompasses all men and women who supply labor for the production of economic goods and services, as defined by the UN System of National Accounts, during a specified time period. According to this system, the production of economic goods and services should include all production and processing of primary products (whether for the market, for barter or for own consumption), the production of all other goods and services for the market, and, in the case of households that produce such goods and services for the market, the corresponding production for own-consumption. Female labor force is the percentage of the total economically active population supplying labor for the production of economic goods and services that is female.	World Development Indicators
Labor - force Gap 1970, 1980, 1995	Percentage of male labor force minus percentage of female labor force.	World Development Indicators

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Appendix 1 (Cont.)

Variable	Definition	Source
Literacy Gap 1970, 1980, 1995	Male literacy rate minus female literacy rate.	World Development Indicators
Enrollment Gap 1970, 1980, 1995	Male gross enrollment ratio minus female gross enrollment ratio.	World Development Indicators
Life Expectancy Gap 1970, 1980, 1995	Male life expectancy minus female life expectancy. In interpreting the life expectancy gap, it is important to keep in mind that females have a biological advantage over males in life expectancy.	World Development Indicators
Income		
GDP per capita in PPP\$ 1970, 1980, 1995	Gross domestic product is total value of the goods and services produced by an economy. It is adjusted here for purchasing power parity (PPP), i.e. the number of units of that currency required to purchase the same representative basket of goods and services that US\$1 would buy in the United States.	Penn World Tables for 1970, 1980, 1992 HDI and WDI for 1995
Population Below US\$1/day 1995	Percentage of population living at or below US\$1 a day of consumption or income at 1985 prices, adjusted for PPP.	World Development Report
Population Below US\$2/day 1995	Percentage of population living at or below US\$2 a day of consumption or income at 1985 prices, adjusted for PPP.	World Development Report
Percentage of People Under the National Poverty Line Different Survey Years	Percentage of population living below the national poverty line. National estimates are based on population-weighted subgroup estimates from household surveys.	World Development Report
Labor Force in Agriculture (%) 1970, 1980, 1995	Labor force in agriculture is the percentage of the labor force supplying labor to the agricultural sector.	World Development Indicators

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Appendix 1 (Cont.)

Variable	Definition	Source
Agricultural Value Added per Hectare 1970, 1980, 1995	Agricultural value added per hectare of agricultural land (the sum of arable land, permanent cropland, and permanent pasture), measured in constant 1987 US\$. Agricultural value added includes that from forestry and fishing.	World Development Indicators
Agricultural Value Added per Worker 1970, 1980, 1995	Agricultural value added per worker supplying labor to the agricultural sector, measured in constant 1987 US\$. Agricultural value added includes that from forestry and fishing.	World Development Indicators
GDP per Worker 1970, 1980, 1995	The gross domestic product at market prices (constant 1987 US\$) divided by total labor force.	World Development Indicators
Education		
Primary Gross Enrollment Ratio 1970, 1980, 1994	The number of students enrolled in primary education, whether or not they belong in the relevant age group for primary education, as a percentage of the population in the relevant age group for primary education.	World Development Indicators
Secondary Gross Enrollment Ratio 1970, 1980, 1993	The number of students enrolled in secondary education, whether or not they belong in the relevant age group for secondary education, as a percentage of the population in the relevant age group for secondary education.	World Development Indicators
Adult Literacy Rate (%) 1970-1995	The percentage of people aged 15 and above who can, with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life.	World Development Indicators
Public Expenditure on Education (% of GNP) 1990	Expenditure on the provision, management, inspection, and support of pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools; universities and colleges; vocational, technical, and other training institutions; and general administration and subsidiary services.	Human Development Report

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Appendix 1 (Cont.)

Variable	Definition	Source
Health		
Access to Safe Water (%) 1975–1980 (av.), 1990–1996 (av.)	Percentage of population with reasonable access to safe water supply, including treated surface water or untreated but uncontaminated water such as that from springs, sanitary wells, and protected boreholes.	World Resources Institute
Access to Sanitation (%) 1990–1995 (av.)	Percentage of population with reasonable access to sanitary means of excreta and waste disposal, including outdoor latrines and composting.	World Resources Institute
Access to Health Care (%) 1990–1995 (av.)	Percentage of population that can reach appropriate local health services on foot or by means of local transport in no more than 1 hour.	UNICEF
Life Expectancy at Birth 1970–1995	The number of years a newborn infant would live if prevailing patterns of mortality at the time of birth were to stay the same throughout the child's life.	World Development Indicators
Infant Mortality Rate 1970–1995	The annual number of deaths of infants under one year of age per 1,000 live births. More specifically, the probability of dying between birth and one year of age multiplied by 1,000.	World Development Indicators
Maternal Mortality Rate 1995	The annual number of deaths of women from pregnancy-related causes per 100,000 live births. According to the Tenth International Classification of Diseases, a maternal death is defined as the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, irrespective of the duration and the site of pregnancy, from any causes related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management, but not from the accidental or incidental causes.	World Resources Institute

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Appendix 1 (Cont.)

Variable	Definition	Source
Public Expenditure on Health (% of GDP) 1994	Public Expenditure on health comprises the expenditure, both current and capital, by all government offices, departments, establishments, and other bodies that are agencies or instruments of the central authority of a country on hospitals, clinics, and maternity and dental centers with a major medical component; on national health and medical insurance schemes; and on family planning and preventive care.	World Development Indicators
Hospital Beds per 1,000 People 1970–1995	Number of hospital beds available per 1,000 people.	World Development Indicators
Nutrition		
Calories Available per capita 1987–1989 (av.)	The per capita average calories available (as a percentage of need) are calories from all food sources: domestic production, international trade, stock drawdowns, and foreign aid.	World Resources Institute
Wasting 1980–1989 (av.)	Wasting indicates current acute malnutrition and refers to the percentage of children between the ages of 12 and 23 months whose weight-for-height is less than 77 percent of the median weight-for-height of the reference population of the US National Center for Health Statistics.	World Resources Institute
Stunting 1980–1989 (av.)	Stunting, an indicator of chronic under-nutrition, refers to the percentage of children between the ages of 24 and 59 months whose height-for-age is less than 77 percent of the median.	World Resources Institute
Political		
Economic Freedom Index 1995, 1996	The Economic Freedom Index examines nine positive measures of economic freedom (trade policy, taxation policy, government consumption of economic output, monetary policy, capital flows and foreign investment,	Heritage Foundation

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Appendix 1 (Cont.)

Variable	Definition	Source
Economic Freedom Index 1995, 1996	banking policy, wage and price controls, property rights, and deregulation) and one negative measure (the size and scope of a country's blackmarket or underground economy). The higher the score, the more government interference and less economic freedom in the economy.	Heritage Foundation
Political Rights 1973, 1980, 1995/96	Political rights enable people to participate freely in the political process, which means the system by which the polity chooses the authoritative policymakers and attempts to make binding decisions affecting the national, regional or local community. In a free society, this means the right of all adults to vote and compete for public office, and for elected representatives to have a decisive vote on public politics. The survey rates political rights on a seven-category scale, 1 representing the most free and 7 the least free.	Freedom House
Civil Liberties 1973, 1980, 1995/96	Civil liberties are the freedom to develop views, institutions, and personal autonomy apart from the State. The survey rates civil liberties on a seven-category scale, 1 representing the most free and 7 the least free.	Freedom House
Access to Information		
TV Sets per 1,000 People 1970-1995	The estimated number of television sets in use, per 1,000 people.	World Development Index
Daily Newspapers per 1,000 People 1995	The number of copies distributed of newspapers published at least four times a week, per 1,000 people.	World Development Index

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Appendix 1 (Cont.)

Variable	Definition	Source
Environment		
Annual Deforestation (%) 1981–1985, 1990–1995	Annual permanent clearing of forestlands for shifting cultivation, permanent agriculture or settlements; it does not include alterations such as selective logging.	Human Development Report
Infrastructure		
Roads Paved (%) 1990, 1996	Percentage of roads that have been sealed with asphalt or similar road-building materials.	World Development Indicators
Telephone Main Lines per 1,000 People 1970–1995	All telephone lines that connect a customer's equipment to the public switched telephone network.	World Development Indicators
Agricultural Input		
Annual Fertilizer Use (kilograms per hectare of cropland)	Refers to the application of nutrients in terms of nitrogen, phosphate, and potash. The fertilizer year is 1 July–30 June; data refer to the year beginning in July.	World Resources Institute
Tractors Average Number 1991–1993	Tractors generally refer to wheeled and crawler tractors used in agriculture. Garden tractors are excluded.	World Resources Institute
Harvesters Average Number 1991–1993	Harvesters refer to harvesters and threshers.	World Resources Institute
Irrigated Cropland (%) 1970–1995	Cropland includes land devoted to temporary and permanent crops, temporary meadows, market and kitchen gardens, and land temporarily fallow. Irrigated land refers to areas purposely provided with water, including land irrigated by controlled flooding.	World Development Indicators

GDP = gross domestic product; PPP = purchasing power parity.

Appendix 2: Statistical Model Used to Make Inferences about Rural QOL from Data on QOL at the National Level

Data on various QOL indicators are generally available at the national level and are not often available broken down into rural data and urban data. Thus, the following approach was used to evaluate QOL in rural Asia:

$$I_{it}^N = (1 - RS_{it}) I_{it}^U + RS_{it} I_{it}^R \quad (1)$$

where I_{it}^N represents the QOL indicator at a national level for time t , country i ; RS is the rural share; I^U is the indicator in urban areas; and I^R is the indicator in rural areas.

It is assumed that the urban and rural indicators can be expressed as follows:

$$I_{it}^U = I_t^U + \varepsilon_{it}^U \quad (2a)$$

$$I_{it}^R = I_t^R + \varepsilon_{it}^R \quad (2b)$$

where I_t^U represents that part of the indicator for urban areas that is common across countries and ε_{it}^U represents that part of the indicator for urban areas that is idiosyncratic and differs across countries. Similarly, I_t^R represents that part of the indicator for rural areas that is common across countries while ε_{it}^R represents that part of the indicator for rural areas that is idiosyncratic. ε_{it}^U and ε_{it}^R are assumed to be randomly distributed.

Substituting (2a) and (2b) into (1) yields

$$I_{it}^N = (1 - RS_{it})(I_t^U + \varepsilon_{it}^U) + RS_{it}(I_t^R + \varepsilon_{it}^R) \quad (3)$$

which can be rewritten as:

$$I_{it}^N = I_t^U + (I_t^R - I_t^U)RS_{it} + (\varepsilon_{it}^R - \varepsilon_{it}^U)RS_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}^U \quad (4)$$

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If

$$v_{it} = (\varepsilon_{it}^R - \varepsilon_{it}^U) RS_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}^U \quad (5)$$

then

$$I_{it}^N = I_t^U + (I_t^R - I_t^U) RS_{it} + v_{it} \quad (6)$$

The intercept of regression equation (6) is an estimate of the indicator for urban areas, while the slope represents the difference between the urban and rural values of the indicator. The error term, v_{it} , captures the variation across countries and is taken to be random.

Appendix 3: Qualitative Perceptions of Quality-of-Life Trends in Rural Asia

This Appendix explores the components of the QOL in parts of rural Asia from the vantage point of rural Asians. Using results from focus groups in villages in the People's Republic of China (PRC), India, and Thailand, the Appendix examines what is important to individuals in determining whether they feel that their lives are improving or deteriorating.

Focus Groups as a Measure of the Quality of Village Life

To make meaningful comparisons of QOL across time and space, objective measures must be used. Such indicators as per capita income, school enrollment, and access to sanitation serve as benchmarks to evaluate the pace of change and progress in QOL for different countries and subpopulations within them. Essentially, these are objective measures of a subjective phenomenon: any measure of the QOL posits what a good life implicitly comprises, and by definition incorporates the value judgments of the researchers and agencies designing the measure. If QOL measures are to be used as the basis of development policy, then policymakers should at least contemplate the way that the actual subjects of such policies, in this case the inhabitants of rural Asia, define what is important to them in terms of QOL. The success of, or support for, such policies may depend on making the kinds of improvements that people want.

Focus groups are a means of gathering information employed mainly by sociologists and anthropologists in order to obtain more detailed and nuanced opinions and attitudes than permitted by traditional methods such as survey analysis. Typically, groups of between 8 and 12 individuals are brought together for sessions lasting up to two hours to participate in a moderated conversation on a specified topic or set of related topics. With the aid of a skilled moderator, participants are

comfortable talking and are willing to contribute. The moderator can also probe responses that address conceptually interesting points of the research (Morgan, 1998). Unlike many in-depth interviews or closed-ended surveys, the questions are left open to allow for the spontaneous emergence of information that the researchers may not have anticipated. In addition, respondents are not forced to answer using categories of the researchers' choosing, and this is likely to generate new information as researchers learn how the subjects of research think about particular topics, and what aspects of those topics are important to them. Generally, the moderator uses a written set of questions as a guide to the discussion.

Focus groups are ideal for exploring such issues as QOL, where researchers are uncertain about what people's responses are likely to be (although they will have hypotheses about them). This is not to suggest, however, that focus groups are entirely open, unstructured discussion sessions. While the moderator allows the conversation to follow unanticipated paths, its underlying structure is based on the question posed by the research team. Thus the moderator steers the conversation so as to direct participants away from topics that are less central, and keeps the discussion focused on issues that are clearly related to the aims of the study (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1998).

The conversational nature of focus groups is crucial to the process for several reasons. First, it allows participants to follow through on an idea at greater length than is normal in attitudinal research. The advantage is that the research team can gain a more complete view of attitudes toward a given topic. In addition, the team can see how subjects weigh various elements of their opinions, that is, what matters more, what is secondary, and why. For example, certain topics may be on the agenda for the group discussion, but whether these arise without prompting or are the result of a question asked by the moderator gives the researchers clues about the importance of the topics for respondents.

A second benefit of putting people together for a discussion is that they can react to what others are saying. Again, this is critical to understanding the complexity and nuances of

issues. By talking together about a specific topic and sparking thoughts, ideas may arise that a single individual would not have conceived (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Participants' reactions to what others are saying allow researchers to track the pattern of associations triggered by specific issues, unconstrained by predetermined responses as in questionnaires. By obtaining a sense of the multiple dimensions of a topic and the way that respondents may qualify or elaborate their ideas, the researchers gain a rich sense of the respondents' interpretations in relation to a specific topic.

Focus groups are almost always audiotaped and often videotaped. The transcripts from focus-group sessions provide a written text that is the source of raw data. With transcripts in hand, researchers analyze what was said, how often, by whom, how they said it, and the level of agreement within the group, to develop a meaningful interpretation. The production of transcripts gives focus groups some advantages over other forms of qualitative research that rely on individual researchers' notes and observations, in that other researchers can work with the data produced in focus groups at a later date and verify findings (Knodel et al., 1984). Because of the quantity of material generated, using everything that was said is rarely feasible, so researchers generally choose and interpret themes that illuminate how the results are related to the original goals and hypotheses of the study (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1998).

Focus groups have a number of advantages that make them particularly suitable for studying QOL in rural Asia. In contrast to previous definitions, it is argued in this volume that numerous direct and indirect factors influence QOL, including income and access to education and health care. Researchers can take advantage of focus groups to see how closely Asian villagers' own perceptions of their lives fit with this argument and what factors they see as determining their QOL. Also, because focus groups are a way to gather information orally, they are an excellent way to investigate illiterate populations that might be excluded from regular survey analysis. This is especially salient for certain groups of rural Asians such as women and the poorly educated.

The greatest disadvantage to focus groups is that the number of participants tends to be small and collected nonscientifically (i.e., by convenience sampling), which limits their extrapolation to whole populations (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1998). Thus, these groups are inappropriate for certain types of data collection, such as where exact frequencies of behavior or attitudes are important. However, for the current study the purpose is to understand existing attitudes and opinions about what influences QOL and what behavior might follow from that.

Twelve focus groups were conducted in total. The three countries, PRC, India, and Thailand, were chosen because they have large populations (especially India and the PRC) and represent different geographical areas of the region. In addition, they present different characteristics in terms of political and economic trajectories: India is a democracy of long standing; Thailand has undergone a fitful, but ultimately probably successful, process of democratization in the 1990s; and the PRC has substantially liberalized its economy without any substantial moves toward political democracy. These differences are likely to influence respondents' opportunities for participation in social and community life, which may affect their perceptions of the quality of their lives.

Regions or provinces were selected that are among the poorest in each nation, although economically higher- and lower-end villages were sought within those in which to conduct the focus groups. The size of villages ranged between 800 and 3,000 inhabitants. In India, the focus groups were carried out in the states of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh; in Thailand in two northern villages in the Chiang Mai region and in the central region (the Nakhon Pothom district, roughly 1.5 hours from Bangkok—on the assumption that the effects of the Asian financial and economic crisis would be more visible there due to the proximity to Bangkok); and in western PRC in Ganzu Province; one of the Ganzu villages was predominantly Han Chinese while the other had a substantial Hui Muslim minority.

The selection criteria for participants in the focus groups were designed to include a range of ages, gender balance, and,

where applicable, occupational diversity such as farm and nonfarm work by the landed and the landless. The exception was in India, where the groups were conducted in single-gender sessions because of social strictures against women interacting with men in public. The groups were conducted by the Harvard Institute of International Development in conjunction with national research counterparts, who were responsible for selecting the groups and moderating them in the local language or dialect. In the PRC, the work was conducted by Dr Wang Jiayi of Northwest Normal University; in India by a team headed by Dr Ajay Mahal from the National Center for Applied Economic Research; and in Thailand by Dr Napaporn Havanon of Srinakarinwirot University.

All sessions followed the same question guide, which opened with the general issue of whether participants felt that they and their communities were better- or worse-off now than 10–20 years ago, and in what ways. This revealed what aspects of QOL were most pertinent to people without prompting them to speak about specific issues. Discussion then included the following topics: the possibility of upward mobility within the village; education (including girls' education); health; paid labor; strength of civil society; political participation; the environment; and the effects of the Asian financial and economic crisis.

Quality of Life Improvements

Evidence is presented here concerning improvements in QOL in Asian villages over the past two decades, especially in terms of infrastructure, education, and social participation. Also considered are gender issues and whether men and women have benefited similarly from changes. The next section examines the negative aspects of the process of development, such as changes in social and family relations, increased inequality or more pollution, and how villagers see these as influencing their QOL.

The Role of Infrastructure

Respondents in all three countries saw at least some improvement in their lives, although the extent of and reasons for the advances differed. Particularly significant was the variety of causes cited, especially given the predominant role that increased income has traditionally played in concepts of QOL. In both India and Thailand, improvements in infrastructure were central to people's evaluations of how their lives have improved; in the PRC, people also viewed infrastructure improvements quite positively.

Where they have been provided, roads, water, and electricity have made an enormous difference in the QOL of rural Asians, and where such infrastructure is lacking were noted as indispensable elements of future improvement. Roads connect people to goods and services, make life more convenient, and potentially increase people's incomes by linking them to jobs and markets where they can sell their products. In those villages without schools, roads were credited with dramatically reducing the time children take to reach school, making it more likely that they will attend. Health care also becomes more accessible. Regardless of whether clinics existed in the villages, villagers associate better care with larger, often urban, communities, and therefore perceive a reduction in travel time to health facilities as an important improvement.

Better transportation, including roads, has given villagers more access to nonfarm jobs such as construction and, very importantly from the respondents' point of view, to markets. A comment typical of the focus groups in all three countries was

"Just 5 years ago, before the road was built, we had to wait for the middleman to buy our vegetables. We didn't know the prices and they only gave good prices to those who knew them. Now it is in our control. If they don't offer good prices, we go to market." (Woman farmer, central Thailand)

Access to water has also had multiple benefits. In addition to the simple convenience of having water either in the home or at nearby communal sites, participants noted the health benefits of a reduction in waterborne diseases. A spillover effect was noted in northern Thailand. There, a focus-group member suggested that children's household labor was no longer needed to perform the arduous task of fetching water and that this allowed more children to attend school. In India, a participant highlighted a gender-specific benefit:

“[Before] we only had one well for the entire village. Women had to draw water from these wells with the help of a rope. It was a taxing and difficult job.” (30-year-old homemaker, Rajasthan)

Electricity has facilitated improvements in water supplies beyond the home and in irrigation, permitting an increase in the number of crops that can be harvested yearly, with an apparent concomitant improvement in incomes and standards of living. It has also brought a range of consumer goods to which participants now have at least some access, especially televisions and refrigerators. The focus groups had mixed views about the benefits of such items. On one hand, they saw television as opening village life to the world—every group mentioned news from national and international sources as a benefit—and as providing entertainment. On the other hand, participants, particularly older ones, saw it as eroding cultural and communal values. In India, participants charged that television programs were killing the Hindu culture and posed a contradiction between the culture of *purdah* and the lifestyles and behavior shown on television. They also, in a criticism common to parents the world over, cited the danger of children paying too much attention to television instead of studying. In the PRC, Muslim participants objected to the values promoted by television, such as showing women uncovered.

The Importance of Education

A second common source of satisfaction and a key ingredient of QOL is access to education. This was one of the first issues many participants mentioned when asked about improvements in their lives over time, and they clearly view the quality of education as a determinant of present and future QOL. The issue of education is among the most complex, because it has multiple influences on QOL and brings into stark relief beliefs about village life and social mobility.

There was broad consensus across all the groups that investing in education for one's children is both necessary and a duty for parents as the only way to ensure a better future for the next generation. Perceptions of higher-quality schooling today in many of the groups, and the better access provided by new infrastructure, mean that people feel themselves better-off in this respect. The reasoning behind the need to invest in education highlights a set of beliefs about what matters for QOL and the possibilities of achieving it. First, they clearly saw education as the key to improving life by moving their children out of farming and into other sorts of jobs. Participants cited three arguments in this respect—the backbreaking nature of farm work, its declining viability in economic terms, and the lack of access to sufficient land:

“Leaving the land means happiness because the land is so arid and the work is so hard.” (Hui male farmer, PRC)

“We want jobs for boys, especially government jobs. We are not satisfied with farming our land. It is a strenuous activity, in heat and in cold. We do not want our children to suffer like us.” (speaker 1)

Jobs can help them become independent.” (speaker 2)

“Anyway there is very little farmland to cultivate.” (speaker 1)

“One needs a minimum of 8 hectares (100 *bighas*) for agriculture to yield substantial earnings.” (speaker 2)

“We also want to be like you.” [speaking to interviewers] (speaker 3)

“We want our children to carry pens and pads like you and work in offices.” (speaker 1) (Dialogue between 30-year-old female self-cultivator, 65-year-old homemaker, and 35-year-old female self-cultivator, Uttar Pradesh, India)

“My parents did farming and they did not want that for us because it is so hard ... so none of my siblings are farmers, and there isn't enough land anyway.” (speaker 1)

“Yes, for those who do farming, if you have to rent land, it is better to switch to other jobs.” (speaker 2) (Young female service worker and middle-aged male tailor and former farmer, Nakhon Pothom, Thailand)

Participants linked social mobility to education. Not only are the jobs available to the educated more prestigious, but also they bring notable economic benefits. In the PRC, for example, participants noted that the newer brick houses, as opposed to the ones made from mud, belonged to people who were better educated. Such mobility, however, takes place outside the village. In every place visited, participants told the same story. Attaining such jobs without going to larger, urban centers is impossible. Opportunities for the well educated within the villages were extremely limited, suggesting that people perceive limits to the long-term viability of village life. People encourage and aspire for their children to leave, even though they would prefer that it was economically possible for them to stay. Indeed, as the comments of one older man in central Thailand underscored, while education is important, it cannot make up for the lack of local opportunity:

“It doesn't matter how much education they get, if they stay, they can't get ahead. Somebody who has no education and leaves [for work in the city] is better off than someone who has an education and stays. Of course, somebody with an education who leaves is in the best position.”

These attitudes, and the out-migration of the economically active population they provoke, suggest potential changes in the social structure of rural Asia. In particular, growing dependency ratios could mean increasing economic vulnerability, especially among the old. The participants in the

focus groups had the attitude that the investments parents make in their children's education are an insurance policy and that they counted on their children to take care of them, even if they were living apart. While a clear sense of the changing dynamics and balance of power between poorly educated parents and better educated children emerged in all the groups, typified by such comments as "Everybody wants their children to be bosses, but they wind up being the bosses of the parents," and "Children listen less and less these days," no group conveyed an imminent feeling of crisis. Rather, the dominant sense was a low-level anxiety about whether their children would fulfil their duties, combined with the hope that they would.

Participants in two northern Thai villages were especially eloquent on this issue. One older male laborer said, "We want them to think of having to repay their parents [for educating them by caring for the parents]. We want them to think that way, but they don't." In the other group, a participant remarked, "You have to force children to take care of them [parents]. We have to teach them they have to do that," suggesting that the older system of intergenerational responsibility is breaking down and has to be relearned. In the PRC, the realities of an urbanizing society and the implications for parental care may be changing long-held preferences and practices in relation to children. Participants noted that in cities, in contrast to villages, many parents now preferred girls and would educate them because they were easier to control and more responsible about taking care of their parents.

Educational investment is undertaken in a context of lower fertility in the PRC and Thailand. As a way to ensure that parents are taken care of when they have fewer children, educating the latter is important. In addition, fewer children mean that families are more likely to be able to take on the expense of educating them. Rural fertility rates in Thailand fell rapidly in the 1970s (Knodel et al., 1984), and this has probably changed the experience and meaning of childhood. Just as declining fertility rates during the 19th century in the industrial West gave rise to Victorian notions of childhood as a separate period in the life

course characterized by innocence, the need for protection, and a greater value placed on children, a similar process appears to be under way in parts of rural Asia.

Thai participants suggested that children today obtain less practical knowledge than before, such as cooking or caring for their siblings, and that parents now safeguard children's time for studying and do not encourage their working in farm activities. A decade and a half ago, Knodel et al. (1984) also found that parents, in contrast to an earlier generation, placed more emphasis on play for children. In the PRC, the notion that children are now much more 'precious' than they used to be, because of the Government's one-child policy instituted in the early 1980s, arose repeatedly during group discussions. As a result, participants noted that people now wanted to take better care of their children and sought better medical care and more education for them. Again, as a result of the focus on education, children are released from domestic labor to attend to their studies, giving new content and meaning to the period of childhood.

Gender and Education

Education is a key ingredient in QOL because of the opportunities it affords and its intrinsic benefits for human actualization. In Asia, gender has frequently been a determining factor in whether people have access to these benefits; girls have been shut out, particularly in rural areas. Although systematic, comparative data measuring educational achievement and attainment for males and females in urban and rural areas have not been collected, Table A3.1 highlights the disparity women have experienced in different Asian nations. Focus-group moderators asked specifically about the importance of girls' education. An interesting finding was that the kinds of opportunities available to women, their family responsibilities, and social policy in the participants' societies seem to influence the response patterns found.

The Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan have among the worst educational indicators in the country for

Table A3.1: General and Rural Discrepancies in Educational Indicators, Selected Asian Countries and Periods

Country	Indicator															
Bangladesh	Strong male–female and urban–rural literacy differences. <i>1991 literacy rates by residence:</i> <table> <tr> <td></td> <td>Urban</td> <td>Rural</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Male</td> <td>73</td> <td>42</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Female</td> <td>52</td> <td>20</td> </tr> </table>		Urban	Rural	Male	73	42	Female	52	20						
	Urban	Rural														
Male	73	42														
Female	52	20														
Cambodia	Female enrollment falls sharply at the secondary school level and accounts for only 13% of higher education enrollment. Substantial urban–rural differences in girls' enrollment, that is, lower secondary enrollments of 48% in Phnom Penh to 32% in rural Svay Rieng.															
China, People's Rep. of	Few differences in primary school enrollment by gender in urban areas, but pronounced differences in rural, mountainous zones. <i>1991/92 enrollment for ages 7–11 by gender and residence:</i> <table> <tr> <td></td> <td>Urban</td> <td>Rural</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Male</td> <td>96.8</td> <td>92.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Female</td> <td>96.6</td> <td>89.7</td> </tr> </table>		Urban	Rural	Male	96.8	92.3	Female	96.6	89.7						
	Urban	Rural														
Male	96.8	92.3														
Female	96.6	89.7														
Nepal	Large rural–urban enrollment gaps by gender, which are exacerbated with school progression. <i>Enrollment rates by age, gender, and residence for 1981:</i> <table> <tr> <td></td> <td>Urban</td> <td>Rural</td> <td>Urban</td> <td>Rural</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Male</td> <td>53</td> <td>33</td> <td>43</td> <td>14</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Female</td> <td>45</td> <td>25</td> <td>32</td> <td>6</td> </tr> </table>		Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Male	53	33	43	14	Female	45	25	32	6
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural												
Male	53	33	43	14												
Female	45	25	32	6												
Pakistan	Differential in male–female literacy rates more pronounced in rural areas. <i>1981 literacy rates:</i> <table> <tr> <td></td> <td>Urban</td> <td>Rural</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Male</td> <td>55</td> <td>26</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Female</td> <td>37</td> <td>7</td> </tr> </table>		Urban	Rural	Male	55	26	Female	37	7						
	Urban	Rural														
Male	55	26														
Female	37	7														
Philippines	In contrast to many countries in Asia, at early ages women do better than men in many conventional educational indicators such as literacy and enrollment. However, by higher education men outpace women. Urban and rural gaps remain; for example, the 1990 literacy rate was 97% for urban females, but 90% for rural females. <i>Age 6–15 enrollment rates (in 1990):</i> <table> <tr> <td></td> <td>Urban</td> <td>Rural</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Male</td> <td>85</td> <td>78</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Female</td> <td>82</td> <td>82</td> </tr> </table>		Urban	Rural	Male	85	78	Female	82	82						
	Urban	Rural														
Male	85	78														
Female	82	82														
Sri Lanka	Male–female educational differences are much less marked than elsewhere in South Asia; girls have caught up with and, on some measures, surpassed boys. Urban–rural differences are also smaller. <i>Enrollment rates by age, gender, and residence for 1981:</i> <table> <tr> <td></td> <td>Urban</td> <td>Rural</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Male ages 5–14</td> <td>86</td> <td>83</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Male ages 15–19</td> <td>45</td> <td>40</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Female ages 5–14</td> <td>86</td> <td>82</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Female ages 15–19</td> <td>48</td> <td>41</td> </tr> </table>		Urban	Rural	Male ages 5–14	86	83	Male ages 15–19	45	40	Female ages 5–14	86	82	Female ages 15–19	48	41
	Urban	Rural														
Male ages 5–14	86	83														
Male ages 15–19	45	40														
Female ages 5–14	86	82														
Female ages 15–19	48	41														

Sources: ESCAP (1995a,b, 1996, 1997a–c); Fiske (1995)

women, and are generally viewed as extremely traditional on most gender-related matters. Rural women fare especially poorly: the 1991 literacy rate of rural women in Rajasthan, 11.6 percent, was by far the worst in the nation, and was not much better in Uttar Pradesh at 19 percent (ESCAP, 1997d). About half the women in the focus groups in these provinces were illiterate, especially those in the higher castes. Nevertheless, there was general support for educating girls to the same level as boys among both men and women, although only the women offered justifications for doing so. Upper-caste women, for whom notions of Hindu female propriety preclude work after marriage (Basu, 1992), saw education for girls in terms of their marriageability and its utility in helping women fulfil their traditional roles of household management and motherhood:

“Now boys demand educated girls for marriage.”
(speaker 1)

“They insist on seeing only educated girls prior to engagement.” (speaker 2)

“Even if they do not want them to work later on, educated individuals are certainly sensible and understanding. Educated girls are able to manage the household and finances better.” (speaker 1) (Exchange between 35-year-old Brahmin female self-cultivator and 65-year-old Jat homemaker in Uttar Pradesh)

“There are many examples [of women working] from our village. Moreover, even if they do not find jobs, they will look after their children well.” (36-year-old Yadav [landowning caste] stitching teacher)

In contrast, many of the lower-caste and unscheduled-caste women defended girls' education in terms of work opportunities. This is not surprising, because they tended both to be more highly educated and literate, as well as employed. Positive discrimination policies by the Indian Government to provide free education and books for lower-caste girls has also worked to improve the educational level of women in this group, because it removes the cost factor from parents' decision making. The participants noted some barriers to girls' education

regardless of caste. When secondary education was not available in the village, this became a larger obstacle for girls than for boys because of parents' greater reluctance to have daughters commute or live elsewhere to attend school.

In Thailand, the focus-group participants, both men and women, uniformly supported equal education of girls, but based on very different arguments than those proffered by the Indian focus groups. They claimed that there should be no distinction between boys and girls in terms of how much education they receive, and asserted that the decisions should be based on the child's intelligence. They advanced several arguments for this. First, the structure of family responsibilities would not suggest giving priority to sons' education. Culturally, Thailand differs from the PRC and India in that daughters rather than sons are responsible for taking care of their parents. Daughters typically do so, and are considered better at taking care of their parents, even from a distance, than sons, who are seen as needing to be the primary earners for their own families. Thus, it makes sense from the point of view of intergenerational resource transfers that girls receive an education. Second, Thai participants saw girls as less physically capable of doing agricultural work. Hence, they argued, girls must have the training to shift out of agriculture into the better-paid service and manufacturing sectors where differences in strength matter less in terms of pay scales. Such an argument makes a great deal of sense in the context of the rural Thai labor market, where women typically earn less, but only because they do less strenuous jobs. When they perform the same jobs as men, pay scales are equal.

In contrast with the discussions in Indian villages, Thai participants expressed the expectation that adult married women would be employed. Thailand has no cultural injunctions against women operating in the public sphere. Such expectations are surely linked to the investment in education that parents are willing to make for girls. Although the data are somewhat contradictory about whether a gender gap in educational enrollment exists at the primary level in Thailand—compare, for example, figures given by the World Bank (1997b)

with those from ESCAP (1998)—the sources coincide in finding no gender gap at secondary level, and microstudies of rural northern Thailand (Mingsarn et al., 1995) suggest that parents do educate their children equally, regardless of gender. In contrast to India and one of the villages in the PRC, the responses of Thai villagers were consistent with the prevailing lack of gender differences in education, and were in keeping with statistical trends in the country.

In the PRC, responses about the importance of girls' education were mixed. In the more remote Hui village situated four hours from the provincial capital of Lanzhou, participants expressed amusement at the question. "Of course girls do not need as much education as boys," they said. "Girls are only going to get married and that is what will assure their futures." In contrast, they see boys as having to be able to support their own families as well as their parents, so that educating them makes sense. In this context of whom to educate, many participants talked about the high costs of education in terms of school fees, books, and clothes. Given that they viewed the decision to send children to school as one that incurs significant monetary costs, and that they saw little return to educating girls, their discounting the idea of gender equality in education is not surprising.

At the other site of Chinese focus groups, a more prosperous Han Chinese village nearer to the capital and with more interaction with the city, there was much more support for girls' education. This was expressed in the context of changing lifestyles in the light of economic development, of the encroachment of urban mores, and of general cultural change. Participants made a connection between education and duty or responsibility to family by stressing the value that is increasingly attached to girls:

"In cities, girls are more valuable than boys now because girls are more well behaved and listen better."
(70-year-old Han Chinese woman farmer)

The implication of this typical comment is that in some contexts, where traditional mechanisms of control over

children, especially sons, are breaking down and where children's fulfilment of the intergenerational bargain is open to question, investing in more easily controllable daughters makes sense because the return is likely to be greater.

Cultural changes also probably account for attitudinal changes that include ideas about girls' education. In this village, general agreement existed among the participants of both focus groups that the past 20 years had meant greater changes for women than for men, in particular for their way of thinking. The following exchange, in response to the question about girls' education, offers a justification for educating women based on their being independent and on new ways of thinking about the position of women:

“Women's ideology has changed a lot, much more than men's.”

“20 years ago, it would have been impossible for us [women] to sit here and talk with you. We can't depend very much on our husbands. We too can drive a tractor; we can support ourselves. We can make our minds up to do better.” (Older male farmer and middle-aged woman farmer)

Overall, the discussions across several cultures about girls' education help to understand existing attitudes and why they change. Where promoting education for girls responds to economic and cultural imperatives, as in Thailand and among lower-caste Hindu women, both attitudes and behavior coincide in ways that make it more likely that girls will be sent to school. In contrast, in a remote traditional area of the PRC, there are neither economic incentives nor cultural support for girls' schooling, and respondents did not favor their equal education. Perhaps most interestingly, we see tentative changes taking place where economic incentives and cultural attitudes are shifting. In rural areas of the PRC more closely linked to urban centers, villagers were beginning to question their beliefs about girls because they saw both declining returns from boys' education as the traditional system of parental support started to fray, and greater opportunities for women.

Improving QOL Through Changing Opportunities for Political and Economic Participation

Focus-group results revealed that social capital and participation in political and economic life are key elements of individuals' perceptions about their QOL. In the PRC and Thailand, political and economic liberalization was clearly linked to improvements in perceived QOL. Participants in Thailand explicitly mentioned increased democracy as something that had changed their lives and communities for the better over the past decade. Indeed, participants in one of the northern villages cited greater democracy as the first aspect of how their lives had improved, and the resulting spontaneous and animated discussion was somewhat surprising. In all of the Thai groups, the participants indicated that they could make their voices heard by public officials, and in contrast with the predemocratic transition period, they were now able to disagree openly and publicly with village leaders.

The discussions echoed the conclusions of much of the academic literature on a positive correlation between education and social participation. For the Thai participants, higher levels of education were intimately linked to more participation and a greater voice in the political process. They viewed educated people as having the skills to make good logical arguments and as being willing to express their opinions and to talk more at public meetings, behavior that respondents linked to better quality of public life. In addition, they noted that educated citizens cannot be as easily tricked or misled by politicians, and that increased education thus has a salutary effect on public life by keeping political leaders honest.

The PRC presents the clearest example of how major institutional changes can have profound effects on QOL. Without exception, the single most important factor cited by the Chinese in improving their lives was the 1978 economic reforms pushed forward by Deng Zhaoping. For the villagers interviewed, these reforms were a watershed that improved their lives enormously: primarily in an immediate economic sense, but also indirectly by increasing the likelihood that they

could educate their children, thereby improving women's lives, fostering more effective political participation, and improving social relations within the village.

The reforms loosened the system of collective farming and allowed individuals to work private plots of land, decide what to grow, and determine whether to market or consume their output. Participants in both villages saw these changes as important in the most basic of ways: giving them more to eat. Older respondents in particular commented on the extent of hunger that had existed in the villages before the reforms. Villagers also spoke about the increased income that had resulted from the change in land policy, and pointed to evidence all around of the differences, such as construction of better houses and school buildings, better furniture (such as real beds instead of mats), and more efficient heating fuels.

In addition to providing income through the ability to shift into higher-priced crops, the reforms freed up time that people used to spend farming collective land. This extra time has allowed some people to shift into nonfarm, remunerated activities. Such activities may be more in keeping with their skills and preferences for nonfarm work. One middle-aged woman spoke of having established a sewing business: "I was always a good seamstress, but before the reforms I had no time at all to sew. I had to work on the collective."

Many women saw themselves as having benefited especially from the reforms. "I think we women gained the most from the reforms. We can now rely on handicrafts; we can earn money ourselves." Men and women nodded in agreement with this sentiment. Thus, changes in broad institutional structures such as the economic system can have an important indirect effect on gender ideology by opening up an economic space for women. Investigators have repeatedly shown that women's ability to earn their own income promotes a shift from traditional attitudes toward more egalitarian ones.

One of the most appreciated results of increased wealth was being able to afford to educate children. Although the much poorer inhabitants of the Hui village still saw education as a major expense, even there it was more within reach than

previously. As elsewhere, the indirect benefits of education were apparent to Chinese villagers: educated farmers were more successful because they could read about the most efficient ways to use fertilizer to obtain the highest yields.

The Chinese villagers also credited the reforms with improving social life and participation. Strikingly, they saw the shift to a cash economy as improving community relations. This is in complete contrast to the focus groups in India and Thailand. In both Chinese villages, participants commented that under the collective agriculture system neighbors had closely monitored each other's behavior for evidence of shirking responsibility, and people were always suspicious of not receiving their fair share of benefits. Community relations were poor as a result. Under the new system, respondents said they were more willing to help their neighbors and that interactions had definitely improved. The change is one of locus of control which, in the Chinese context, translates into the idea of choice. One of the recurrent notions participants used to express their sense of how life had improved was freedom of choice. Farmers can choose what to plant; no one tells them what they have to grow. Whether they succeed or fail is an outcome of their own making. The seamstress can decide what to do; it is her choice. This ability to choose was a strong component of Chinese perceptions of improved QOL.

At the community level, Chinese villagers also indicated that they had more control over the decisions that affect their lives. The role of local Communist Party officials has changed as a result of the economic reforms. Because the Party's reward structure has changed, officials have more incentives to listen to citizens. Focus-group participants noted that the job of local party leaders used to be mobilizing cadres, but now they are responsible for economic growth and development. As a result, respondents found the leaders to be much more open to suggestions from villagers and to listen more. These officials have lost the power to control and silence villagers through their power to assign collective land. As a result, participants said they felt freer to object and question officials, and that they had more ability to influence the decisions that were taken locally.

The Trade-offs and Limits to QOL Gains

While the focus-group results revealed marked improvements in many rural Asian settings, they also indicated that residents of these areas perceived limits as to how much their lives had improved, trade-offs inherent in the process of development, and areas of marked deterioration. Some of these are country- or region-specific and somewhat exceptional, such as the AIDS crisis in Thailand. Others are more general, such as environmental problems or a lack of access to employment opportunities. Still others are common across countries, but the way in which they influence QOL depends on the institutional context. This section explores those aspects of QOL that participants felt had declined or stagnated.

The HIV/AIDS Crisis in Thailand

The only focus groups conducted where respondents claimed that their QOL had actually deteriorated were those in Chiang Mai, northern Thailand. The source of pessimism for these Thai villagers was clear: the HIV/AIDS epidemic. This is the area of the country most affected by the disease. Poignant statements such as, "Nowadays, people are supposed to live to 80, but now the children are dying before their parents," underscore what HIV/AIDS means in rural Thailand and show that inhabitants see this health crisis as one of the central determinants of their QOL. In central Thailand, participants acknowledged that AIDS was a problem in response to the moderator's questions, but it did not arise spontaneously, presumably because its severity there was not of the same magnitude as in the north.

There are indications that the problem is at least slowing down. In all the villages, participants attributed the problem to an earlier lack of knowledge about how to prevent transmission of the disease. The quality and frankness of discussion about the mechanisms of infection were impressive. Participants also noted that most of the current infections were not recent. They thought that as these members of the

community died, the problem would decline. These comments also suggest that the Thai government's public education campaigns with AIDS prevention messages have succeeded in reaching people in rural areas.

Effects of the Money Economy

In many ways, the disappointments and frustrations that focus-group participants expressed were negative features of some of the improvements they have realized. A good example of this is greater integration into the cash economy. While people in each country appreciated the increase in material goods, they also, to varying degrees, perceived a negative aspect to their economic development. Although access to goods makes people's lives easier, and in many ways more productive, it also changes perceived needs. New purchased necessities may replace what was formerly produced at home. For economists this is an improvement, because people are essentially consuming higher-quality products for the same or a lower real price. However, the dependence on cash and the need for continued employment to keep consuming these products produced a sense of insecurity among focus-group participants. In particular, the shift from a subsistence farm economy to one more integrated into the market created worries about continued ability to afford this new lifestyle, and a sense of unease about no longer being self-sufficient. Tractors have replaced cows or buffalo in the fields and "eat gasoline instead of grass" (northern Thai focus group); chemical fertilizer must be purchased in lieu of cow dung; and parents have a duty to educate their children to a much higher level than was true of an earlier generation.

In general, people seemed to understand this as a trade-off, and one that they were ultimately willing to accept. Generally, fears were most pronounced in Thailand, perhaps because the effects of the Asian financial and economic crisis have been deepest there, and slow growth and the possibilities of falling into debt seemed the greatest. In central Thailand, participants noted that electricity meant that people had to earn cash to pay their electricity bills and for appliances, and

worried about what would happen if they could not pay. In addition, in all the Thai groups, some villagers mentioned the high cost of living today compared with the past. Even when they noted that they, of course, earned more today than in the past, having to pay for these new 'necessities' meant that they did not necessarily feel richer. However, in terms of QOL, despite the trade-offs, participants believed that they were on the winning side of the equation—when asked if they would prefer to return to the past, they emphatically stated that they would not.

The groups also credited the increased monetarization of village life with affecting the quality of social ties. In Thailand, a strong sense emerged that it was destroying the solidarity of communities, with a concomitant decline in QOL:

“10 years ago, everyone would work on the rice harvest together, but now you have to pay money for people to come work with you. People used to look out for each other; now they can't. Everyone has to look out for himself.” (Older male farmer, northern Thailand)

“People are very selfish today, not so honest, very concerned about money. It used to be after the harvest we would all gather in the temple. Now no one has time, they just do things on their own; they have to work.” (Middle-aged woman, central Thailand)

In India, such sentiments of community breakdown were less widespread and were confined to men, perhaps because they are the ones who operate in the public sphere:

“People are busy taking care of their interests so that community interests have been ignored. If I decide to clean the village streets, there will not be a single person who will help me. I alone cannot achieve much ... Cooperation has declined a lot among us. Farmers are constantly expanding the size of their individual holdings by cutting off the edges of the public road—it has become so narrow. If there is still some togetherness, it is because we have been like this all our lives.” (27-year-old private school teacher, Uttar Pradesh)

“Social life has changed, become self-centered, and community systems have seen a decline. People have less time for each other.” (49-year-old government teacher, Uttar Pradesh)

As noted earlier, the results from the PRC were the opposite of this. Every focus group there noted the improvement in social relationships among village inhabitants. With the reduction of the collective farming system and its related social control, Chinese villagers felt more able to offer voluntary assistance to their neighbors when no one was forcing them to do so. The contrast between countries underscores the important role of institutional context in structuring behavior.

The Limits of Participation

While it has been demonstrated that increased possibilities for influencing local decisions affecting communities are an important aspect of QOL, there are also limits that raise crucial policy issues. First, results from Thailand suggest that in the context of decentralized decision making, communities' power to influence what happens to them may be circumscribed when higher levels of jurisdiction determine policy outcomes. Both the villages in the Nakhon Pothom district of central Thailand were negatively affected by landfills close to them. Focus-group participants noted the smell, the vermin, and the health fears they experienced. Powerful district-level forces had pushed the project through, and by the time the communities realized what was happening it was too late to do anything about it. Respondents noted how powerless they had been in the face of this situation; yet these same participants had discussed how much influence they had in local decision making.

If individuals' ability to determine what happens to them and their communities enhances their QOL, then the level at which power actually resides and the kind of links individuals have to those levels must be considered. In the case of the landfill, no vertical links appear to have existed between the

villagers and district-level organizations that might have been able to coordinate local opposition to the project. In the current policy environment, which favors decentralization as a means of empowering local communities, different levels of government frequently influence local outcomes. In the absence of establishing effective organizational ties and flows of information between levels, decentralization is unlikely to be the solution to the problem of how to turn control over to citizens.

A second example of the lack of effective participation and the limits of simple legal changes was raised by participants in India, where experiments have been made with increasing local political power through the *panchayati* or village council system. These councils are elected locally to represent villages at the district and state levels. To promote greater female participation and empowerment, 30 percent of council seats have been reserved for women. In the Uttar Pradesh village in our sample, the presence of a woman as head of the village council (*sarpanch*) initially gave the appearance of female empowerment; however, in reality this *sarpanch* had no political power whatsoever, as the following discussion shows:

“There is no one who listens to a woman [reference to woman *sarpanch*].” (35-year-old female construction worker)

“My husband does everything. He does not allow me to go outside. He does not let me go to the *panchayat* meetings.” (*sarpanch*)

“There is a system of *pardah* and usually we are not allowed to speak in the presence of men.” (35-year-old farmer)

“Our husbands take the responsibility for communication [with the outside world].” (40-year-old milk vendor)

In the men’s focus group in this village, participants defended the *sarpanch*’s husband, whom they would view as violating their beliefs about the role of women and not fulfilling his duty to protect his wife if he allowed her to participate. As a result, government-mandated quotas for female representation have led to the presence of titular heads, with little real

advancement in the status of women. This example illustrates the limits of legal change in the face of entrenched cultural beliefs. While carrying out the letter of the law, male villagers circumvent its spirit, which contradicts their ideas about the proper place of women in the social order.

Importance of Policy Implementation for QOL

In analyzing advances in QOL, situations in which expected outcomes did not occur need to be investigated. This highlights the importance of implementation. One of the clearest findings from the focus groups was that the provision of infrastructure can have dramatic effects on QOL. However, simply constructing roads, for example, does not guarantee that farmers or other rural inhabitants will have access to markets—there have to be markets to access. Similarly, training villagers for alternative jobs to farming is likely to have little effect in improving their QOL if such jobs are unavailable.

These points were raised by focus-group participants in the poorer of the two northern Thai villages and in India. In the communities in northern Thailand, some farmers were diversifying into mushrooms, watermelons, and cut flowers, while the homemakers' associations were struggling to develop lucrative projects such as handicrafts or canning. The desire to find a better source of stable income than rice farming was the source of much discussion in the villages among inhabitants and local elected committees. These local committees were preparing proposals for government-run, competitive social funds, where villages could secure low- or no-interest loans for pilot projects. A strong fear of the villagers was the government's likely lack of follow-through for any such project, thereby imperiling its success. Citing examples of previous government programs, such as training for handicrafts, that had failed to lead to jobs because crucial information about how to market the products successfully was lacking, they saw the government's inability to fully implement programs as being negatively related to their QOL. One of the homemakers' associations, desperate to find new ideas for

possible projects, could only reject common schemes such as canning or handicrafts because they knew of similar nearby examples where these had failed, and were consequently afraid to apply for loans.

This criticism of the government as providing only training or advice for projects was similar to complaints in India that technical job training in fields such as welding had failed to lead to jobs because the government did not help people find them, and was not committed to hiring them. This is particularly interesting from a policy perspective. Simply empowering people by giving them training and expecting them to flourish on the basis of more proximate control may not be enough to improve QOL. At least in these small rural communities, participants voiced enough doubts about local capacity to suggest that, even in a democratic political culture, decentralization is an insufficient strategy for generating new forms of employment. At the very least, longer periods of technical assistance and more follow-up in implementation may be necessary if local beneficiaries are to experience the benefits of rural employment development schemes.

Rising Inequality

Although discussions of increasing village inequality as the result of development surfaced only in the PRC, the participants' interpretation of this was somewhat unexpected. Many analysts of Chinese economic reforms have pointed to growing inequality, both across regions and within communities, as one of the costs of liberalization. Focus-group participants, even in a remote western village, were aware that other regions, particularly in the south, had developed much more quickly and had been given priority by the government. They felt that Ganzu had fallen behind, that the benefits of the reforms had been much more apparent in the first 10 years, and that the State was neglecting them. As a result, they foresaw fewer prospects for continued improvements in their lives and expressed a sense of unfairness that they were being neglected.

In great contrast to this was opinion about local economic inequality. Respondents in all the Chinese focus groups defended growing inequality on the grounds of individual merit. It is fair, they claimed, that some people get richer than do others because it is due to hard work, education, and intelligence. Because they saw local success as dependent on individuals' capacity and initiative, they supported the widening gap between residents as just, and as a reward for those enviable personal traits.

On Balance: The Preference for Rural Living

One of the most interesting findings of the focus groups was the respondents' perspectives on the relative merits of village life compared with city life. The mixed nature of the discussions highlighted the difficulties many communities in rural Asia face. On the one hand, the conversations revealed a strong attachment to the way of life that has existed and a recognition of the benefits that come with village life. On the other hand, virtually all the participants saw the city as the only viable future: even if they did not want to leave themselves, their hopes for their children centered on their being able to leave the villages.

The positive aspects of village life primarily centered on the quality of social interactions; the lower level of environmental degradation; and the fact that as amenities come to the villages, the advantages of cities over the countryside diminish. Even if many people saw social ties as deteriorating in the villages, participants in all three countries still found them far superior to those prevalent in the cities. They frequently described cities as cold places where people do not know their neighbors, have little contact with others, and do not help each other. "Many urban facilities have now become commonplace in the villages, such as septic tanks." This comment from a male Indian worker in response to whether he preferred urban or rural life suggests that the decreasing infrastructure gap between villages and cities raises the appeal of village life.

Participants were also very aware of urban pollution problems and saw this as an area where village life was far superior to cities.

“We prefer the village life. There is a more healthy atmosphere, fresh air, good people, compassion. In urban areas there is a lot of pollution.” (32-year-old homemaker, Uttar Pradesh)

“Lanzhou is not better than here. It is very polluted. I heard that on the news.” (Middle-aged woman, Ganzu Province)

Even when pollution problems exist locally, the participants still saw the cities as worse-off:

“Earlier, there was hardly any pollution in the village. Now there are problems because of uncovered sewage lines. When they are blocked there is no one to repair them. However, I will grant that pollution is still less in rural areas compared with cities.” (35-year-old male grower, Rajasthan)

The problematic aspect of village life centers on its future prospects. The focus groups expressed two main fears in this connection: the lack of enough land to support farmers (especially pertinent in India), and the lack of good nonfarming jobs. Cities are seen as the only solution to villagers' hopes for the future. Many older respondents could not envision themselves moving to cities, both because they felt comfortable where they were, and because a frank assessment of their skills meant that their prospects in cities were extremely limited. However, generally their aspirations were for their children to obtain enough education and to work in the cities.

“Let's face it, good jobs are available only in the cities. In the village one can only become a teacher ... I know that doctors also come and live in villages. Engineers solve problems. Doctors take care of the sick. These jobs are good because they impart knowledge to others. Even teachers are not bad. But good jobs are available mostly in the cities.” (30-year-old homemaker, Rajasthan)

This is the essential dilemma facing development policymakers. How can rural areas sustain their populations in ways that enhance QOL? In many cases, villagers prefer their lives and would ideally stay in the villages and keep their children there, but they see no future in the villages. This pessimism is related to decisions such as out-migration to cities, which puts stresses on urban centers and leaves rural areas with disproportionately dependent populations.

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